(c) The standing guidelines for Embassies abroad in such cases require prompt action in taking up the complaints of Indian workers with the local authorities concerned and providing all necessary support to them.

Release of fishermen and civilian prisoners by Pakistan

1003. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA:
SHRI ABANI ROY:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that in the recent past Pakistan has indicated its intention six times to release 400 Indian fishermen and civilian prisoners, including the cases of 22 Sikh youths, in their custody but nothing has materialized so far;

(b) if so, whether this is attributable to our ineffective diplomatic efforts or there are other hidden rationale behind this state of affairs;

(c) since when such fishermen are in custody of Pakistan; and

(d) the details of the efforts made at diplomatic level to get them released so far?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (d) As per available information, Pakistan had 416 Indian fishermen in its custody apprehended by Pakistan Maritime Security Agency since January, 2002 onwards. Pakistan, in the past, on several occasions indicated its intention to release over 200 fishermen. No follow up action was, however, taken by Government of Pakistan for release and repatriation of these fishermen. Government have consistently taken up the issue of their release and repatriation with the Government of Pakistan. As a result of Government's efforts, Government of Pakistan agreed to release 280 fishermen on 24th February, 2003. Pakistan has yet to confirm the release of Sikh youths and other civilian prisoners.

Indo-China relations

1004. SHRI SURENDRA LATH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal to establish better Indo-China relations;

(b) if so, the specific steps taken in that regard; and

(c) the response of the Government of China thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (c) Government of India is committed to the development of friendly and good neighbourly relations with China on the basis of the principles of Panchsheel, mutual sensitivity to each other's concerns and equality. This has been underscored during recent high level political exchanges between India and China, including during the visit of President to China in May-June, 2000, visit of senior Chinese leader and NPC Chairman in January 2001, visit of Chinese Premier in January, 2002, visit of EAM to China in March/April, 2002 and the visit of Speaker to China in January, 2003.

Relations between India and China have continued to develop and diversify. Important developments marking the prog-ess of India-China relations include the initiation of direct Delhi-Beijir.g flights, the first meeting of the India-China dialogue mechanism on counter-terrorism, the completion of the process of exchange of maps for clarification of the Line of Actual Control in the Middle Sector, the implementation of the MoU on sharing hydrological data from the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra and accordance of Approved Tourist Destination Status to India by China.

Bilateral trade has continued to grow smoothly. Exchanges of functional delegations and defence delegations also progressed. Both sides have underlined their commitment to continue to develop their relations while simultaneously continuing to address their differences through dialogue.

Relationship with China

1005. DR. AKHILESH DAS: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state the steps, if any, taken by Government during the last three months to improve political, cultural, economic and trade relations with China, in the context of growing closer Chinese relations with Bangladesh, Myanmar and other neighbouring States contiguous to India?